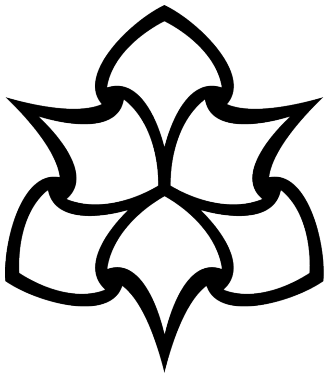

EDITORIAL

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Crafting health, well-being and happiness

Craft as a profession has long been associated with dexterity and skill, independence and fulfilment. From the Renaissance onwards, we have many accounts of craftsmen and women who take great care and responsibility in their practice and who present their work and themselves with pride. Today, with the advent of leisure time, growth in ageing populations and medical and technological advances, the crafts have become more multi-layered than ever, with applications in areas well beyond traditional professions. With this shift, craft practice is increasingly recognized as a positive influence on personal and communal well-being when used as a vocational, leisure and social activity.

The crafts involve makers working individually and/or coming together in the studio, home, community and public spaces. Hands-on workshops in art, craft or design collectives, galleries and activist groups support a 'making together' approach (Sennett 2013). Public, craft-based initiatives in the United Kingdom and their equivalents worldwide represent some of the most popular television, podcasts and blogs, reflecting a shared understanding of the enjoyment experienced through skills exchange, social interaction, cohesion and support, which benefit participants' well-being to varying degrees, for example, knitting circles small and large – in someone's home, community centre, charity or knitting shop or on public transport, such as the Circle Line project on the London Underground. Hands-on research workshops in gallery settings or craft activist (craftivism) projects, including Amy Twigger-Holroyd's 'Reknit Revolution' (Sadkowska and Walker 2018) or the Crochet Coral Reef project (Wertheim and Wertheim 2015), support local and global making communities. Few of these opportunities to practice are as publicity-oriented (or competitive) as *The Great British Bake Off* (or similar programmes including the *The Great Pottery Throw Down* and *The Great British Sewing Bee*), but they represent a shared understanding of the enjoyment to be found in hobbies, amateur and professional skilled making in and beyond the domestic environs of the home. What is of increasing public interest is not only the journey of skills enhancement but how this impacts upon individuals' self-esteem and agency. From such craft activity ensues responsibility for one's work, the wish to show and share, a therapeutic focus that can help with concentration and confidence, anxiety and depression, and creative and social elements that offer satisfaction, contributing to well-being and happiness.

In more direct health-related contexts, there are growing examples of craft interventions in biomedical technology catalysing medical advances. Traditional model making and casting techniques, alongside body scanning, 3D printing and additive manufacturing, are being combined to advance surgical procedures and training through the crafting of replacement organs, skeletal parts and complete bodies. Tissue engineering and textiles have been assimilated to develop implants for the human body, such as the 'Nit Occlud' valve, hand constructed by the indigenous Aymara women in Bolivia (The Knitting Space 2015), embroidered components, such as Ellis Development's 'Bio-implantable device for reconstructive shoulder surgery', 2004, featured as the Remarkable Image in *Craft Research* 4:1 (2013: 144). Craft, technology and user-experience have been synthesized to create contemporary prosthesis, to be more ergonomic, affordable and aesthetic, as designed by Cook and Pullin (2020) in their Hands of X project and by Rosenberger in this issue. Hybrid, participatory approaches are impacting on the development of bespoke garments and wearable accessories that work with individual bodies, as researched and exhibited in, *Universal Materiality* (Parsons School of Design 2019). Other examples where health and well-being, hand and digital crafting come together include fab labs, like The Weaving Hand (2019), a Brooklyn-based sustainable weaving studio and healing arts centre, which offers developmental programmes to support adults and children with intellectual, emotional and physical disabilities. This is in line with increasing evidence that a combination of creative and social activity can help with mental health and maintaining cognitive faculties (e.g. Adams-Price and Morse 2018).

The articles in this issue reflect many of these themes, beginning with the article by Madeline Rosenberger, which looks at advancements in prosthetics, and how this can help people in conflict zones where access to traditional prosthetics can be restricted due to costs, time, available materials and expertise. Rosenberger reviews the criteria and processes involved in crafting prostheses in established and digitally augmented ways to demonstrate the benefits and shift in understanding evident in their making and cultural acceptance. An example of this work is featured on the cover.

Stephanie Bunn focuses on the relationship between basket-work, well-being and recovery, as practiced in a series of recent workshops in Scotland. Bunn contextualizes a historical association between basket making and occupational therapy following First World War in the mid-twentieth century (up until the 1960s and 1970s) and before this in the early nineteenth century when parents of visually impaired children petitioned blind 'Asylums' to take in their offspring to train them in skills with which they could make a livelihood (Bunn 2018a). The focus of the recent basketry workshops is on the health improvements found in people suffering from dementia, whose affinity with this form of intricate hand making has enhanced cognitive and social interaction.

Hunt, Piper and Worker report on 'the importance of sensorial empathy and the language of touch when crafting textiles with [and for] people who are visually impaired'. The article reports on a research project between academics and undergraduate textile students with the Nottingham-based charity, My Sight, providing insights into the often, overlooked significance of haptic, sensory engagement with the materials that surround us in everyday life. The priority to 'visualize' everything that we make and do is challenged through craft practice informed by different sensorial values, particularly touch, but also hearing and smell. The methodology employs sensory ethnography as a way of 'making sense through hands' and bodies (Groth 2017).

Kate Court's article adopts a methodological focus. She discusses the use of grounded theory to developing methods appropriate to researching the understanding and experiences of knitting as serious leisure. The aim of her work is to offer methods that preserve the authentic participants' voice.

The Position Paper by Victoria Squire and Sophie Homer explores psychological perspectives on letterpress and its potential to enhance well-being. The authors reflect on undergraduate student engagement with the traditional typesetting process and craft skill of letterpress by exploring its distinctive qualities and relevance in the current design curriculum. Using their own and students' observations they question the more singular, homogenous approach of digital print production and the associated effects of seeking 'perfection' on creative practice and mental health (Smith, et al. 2017). Unlike digital print, letterpress requires physical activity, acceptance of serendipitous mark making and is undertaken in a social and communal space. Comparisons are also made between hand setting type and other crafts, such as textiles that are tangible, tactile and involve working with one's hands, which can be satisfying and rewarding (Pöllänen 2015).

Ruth Elvira Gilmore's biographical Portrait charts the impact of her personal journey in dealing with the physiological and psychological challenges of ill health through the development of a

multidisciplinary craft practice involving what she calls 'mattering'. Drawing on Karen Barad, Michel Foucault and Judith Butler's writings and understandings of the body and its vulnerable place in the world, Gilmour's narrative reveals how: '[v]ulnerability implicates us in what is beyond us yet part of us, constituting one central dimension of what might tentatively be called our embodiment' (Butler 2014: 11).

Incorporating jewellery, ceramics, multimedia and textiles, Gilmour's still-evolving practice shifts from the hands-on tooling of metal and clay to more gentle, remote digital production methods. The idiosyncratic material outcomes reflect and respond to the maker's fluctuating health while enabling her to process and alleviate pain.

Lisa Shawgi reviews *Lustre 2019*, an annual craft exhibition staged at Lakeside Gallery, University of Nottingham, showcasing the work of established and emerging makers from the United Kingdom. Shawgi uses examples of makers working in jewellery, ceramics and wood, to demonstrate how sustainable material sourcing and making strategies are informing empathic design approaches and products (Mattelmaki et al. 2014).

The MinD international conference 2019 *Designing with and For People with Dementia: Wellbeing, Empowerment and Happiness* is reviewed by James Self. The conference sought to bring together professionals from design and health, users with lived experience and user organizations to discuss the role and support that design can offer people with dementia and their carers at the various stages of the condition. Keynote speakers were chosen representatively to include a lived experience speaker, a designer and a health researcher with a focus on mindfulness.

Although each article represents a different example of how craft research is impacting on health and well-being, they are all underpinned by strong recurring themes of hybridity, collaboration and community. Most of the researcher practitioners employ pre- and post-digital, artisanal skills (Openshaw 2015), leading to critical, creative work that traverses physical and virtual realms in the pursuit of outcomes that enhance human experience.

Acknowledgements

We are delighted to present Issue 11.1 of *Craft Research*. As always, many people have been involved in the realization of this issue. We wish to thank all our contributors, and those authors whose submissions we regrettably had to turn away. Our gratitude also extends to all our advisors and to our reviewers for their excellent work. Their constructive advice and feedback to authors is an essential part in fulfilling the developmental role of the journal and in advancing the field. We further wish to thank Intellect Publishers for their amazing and unwavering support for our journal, in particular, our journal's manager, Bethan Ball, and our new production editor, Laura Christopher and her team.

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